

dealing with Indians he wants to offer right away. We hope that can be done. He knows there is going to be a second-degree amendment offered to that. That will take several hours.

I think we are moving down the road on this most important energy legislation. Once we get the amendments, we can better advise the majority leader and Senator DASCHLE as to how long we estimate it will take. We have acknowledged, in our assembled meetings of Democrats, that we appreciate your allowing the Senate to work its will, and not, as has been done in the past on more occasions than we would like to acknowledge, just filing cloture. You have indicated you are not going to do that until you believe it is necessary, and I don't think it is necessary, at this stage.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of the assistant Democratic leader. We are in discussions. The real objective is to have a list of amendments so we can have the definition to both gather support on both sides of the aisle and to really give a focus so we can establish a roadmap by which we can adequately debate, adequately amend this bill appropriately so. That is the purpose. Again, we are working on both sides of the aisle, with the two managers of the bill to that end.

Mr. President, I want to very briefly comment on the last 2 weeks. As we start each week—at least as I start each week, I can't help but come in early Monday morning and look at where we have been and project where we are going. As I laid out the schedule, where we are going is pretty clear, in terms of how we will spend the next 3 weeks on the floor of the Senate. I hope the clarity and the specific plan that I lay out—recognizing it can be modified at any time and should be modified according to circumstances that arise over the course of the day, but I hope that outlook, that vision of where we are going, that agenda setting, does facilitate the overall action, debate, and amendment process of this body.

It also gives me the opportunity to look back over the last 2 weeks. Indeed, as I look back over the last 2 weeks, we made huge progress, I believe, especially for America's taxpayers. That 2003 jobs and growth bill passed by Republicans in the Senate, signed by President Bush, will provide an average of \$1,786 in tax relief for over 45 million married couples. Forty million families with children will see their taxes lowered by over \$1,549.

Six million single mothers will receive an average tax cut of over \$550. Twelve million elderly taxpayers will receive an average tax cut of \$1,401. Meanwhile, 3 million individuals and families will be taken off the tax rolls completely.

Indeed, that is progress. That is action. That is delivery for the American people. Republicans in the House and Senate worked hard to provide this

substantial tax relief for America's working families. Indeed, we have delivered.

Democrats spent a lot of time talking about tax relief for minimum-wage families. But it was the Republicans who took action and got tax relief done. Thanks to Republicans, the Senate now has provided tax relief for families at all income levels, including middle-class families in which both parents work. Working families will now have extra money in their budgets to pay the bills, to purchase clothes, to put food on the table, and maybe even take a family road trip.

Last week, we passed a second tax bill that provides additional tax relief for families with children. This bill included some important tax reforms as well. This second family tax relief bill in 2 weeks creates a uniform definition of a child. Instead of five confusing and even seemingly conflicting and separate definitions, the Tax Code has been simplified to make it easier for folks to fill out the forms and get the tax relief to which they are entitled.

Tax simplification has been a long-standing goal of Republicans. Expect more efforts on the part of Republicans to make the Tax Code more understandable and less burdensome for America's tax filers.

That family tax relief bill will also accelerate the currently scheduled increase in the refundability of the child tax credit, and it will phase in the elimination of a marriage penalty that is built into that current formulation of the credit. These fixes will allow the child tax credit to benefit more middle-income families.

Together, just in the last 2 weeks, the 2003 jobs and growth package coupled with the family tax relief bill provide the third largest tax relief in the history of the United States. These actions have helped lift consumer confidence.

Interest rates and inflation remain low. Credit conditions have improved as long-term interest rates have fallen to their lowest levels since the 1950s. Families are rebalancing their debt from short-term consumer credit to longer term credit such as mortgages—a wise and prudent move. We are seeing declines in energy prices.

We have a lot of reasons to be optimistic. Economic growth increased 1.6 percent in the first quarter of this year, up slightly from 1.4 percent in the last quarter of this year. Many economists expect continued growth in the current quarter. Consensus forecasts expect growth to approach 3.7 percent by the final quarter of this year.

I say this in a very optimistic vein as we look to the future. Yet there are some clouds. We heard last week the unemployment rate has risen to levels last seen in the economic upturn of 1994. This suggests the growth in the economy over the last few years has been in large part due to rapid productivity gains.

In addition, since 1999, the rising cost of health benefits has exceeded the growth in wages and salaries. As a result, health care costs are driving up the cost of hiring and employing workers. In other words, good jobs are becoming more expensive—another important reason we need to strengthen Medicare, to save and preserve and strengthen and indeed modernize Medicare and add prescription drug coverage the right way, not just giving new benefits without consideration that we have an obligation to make sure whatever we promise can be sustained, not just in the short term and in the midterm but in the long term.

We need to look at all the ways we can expand the economy, and in turn increase the supply of good jobs for America's workers.

If we look to the last 2 weeks and project over the next 3 weeks as we have addressed tax relief and tax reform, a sound sustainable energy policy as well as strengthening and improving Medicare and adding a prescription drug benefit, I think the American people and our colleagues will agree we are moving America forward by doing business in a sound and productive way.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for morning business not to extend beyond the hour of 1 p.m., with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Maine.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 1208 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator is recognized.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I understand we are in morning business.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. That is correct.

THE ENERGY BILL

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I will talk a little bit about the pending business that will be before us at 1 o'clock. That, of course, is the Energy Bill.